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About the Utah Gull

BY REV. S. H. GOODWIN

THE return of the gulls brings to mind a curious situation in relation to the specific name of the sacred bird of the Latter Day Saints. If we may judge from the variety of names applied to these birds, which come in such numbers—in the spring—into the valleys of central Utah, more or less of uncertainty exists as to the species.

In an article by H. L. Graham, in *Popular Science Monthly*, Vol. 52, these birds are called the American herring gulls (*Larus argentatus smithsonianus*), a subspecies, by the way, which was eliminated from the Check-List by the Eleventh Supplement. Olive Thorne Miller in "A Bird-Lover in the West," writes interestingly of some of the habits of the Utah gull, which she calls the "Herring Gull" (*L. a. smithsonianus*?)

It is not surprising that those who write bird articles and books of a popular character should sometimes be less than exact when applying the accepted nomenclature to "our little brothers of the air": the object in view may not seem to require accuracy in this respect. The matters which receive the attention of such writers are the habits and haunts and individuality and life of the birds. But that a recognized authority on the subject should, apparently, slip in this matter does afford occasion for surprise.

In that excellent and most serviceable work, "A Handbook of Birds of the Western United States," Vernon Bailey has the following in connection with the Franklin gull (*Larus franklini*): "* * * In Utah their services are so well appreciated that Brigham Young used to offer up prayers that they be sent to destroy the grasshoppers that infested the land. One often sees flocks of fifty to five hundred catching grasshoppers on the wing, wheeling, diving, and rising, till at a distance the white flock suggests a wild flurry of snowflakes." This reference to the local history, and to the habits of the Utah gulls, is correct, but the name is not. The writer, of course, does not know what gulls earned the lasting gratitude of the Mormon people in the pioneer days of '48—the story of which was told by President Smith in the "Deseret Evening News" of February 14, 1903—but, if they were the Franklin, then that species has been replaced by another, for the gulls which now find their way into these valleys by the thousands, are the California gulls (*Larus californicus*).

I have seen thousands upon thousands of these gulls during my six years' residence in the state; I have photographed them repeatedly; I have watched them for hours as they circled about the newly plowed field, or followed close behind the plowman, as blackbirds do in some localities, or sunned themselves on the ridges of the furrows after a hearty meal of worms; I have studied them as they fared up and down the river in search of dead fish and other garbage, or assembled in countless numbers in some retired, quiet slough where they rent the air with their harsh, discordant cries and demoniac laughter, or sailed on graceful wing in rising circles till lost in the deep blue of heaven, and I have yet to see a Franklin gull. As I write, the skin of a beautiful specimen lies before me. The bird was shot out of a flock of fifty or more just like it, and there were hundreds of others of the same species about me at the time—California gulls, every one.

And, not only has no Franklin gull come within range of my observation, but, so far as my knowledge extends, the species has not been taken in Utah. Mr. H. C. Johnson, of American Fork, this state, who has had several interesting arti-

cles in THE CONDOR, and who for a decade or more was engaged in making extensive collections of the eggs of Utah birds, tells me that he has not seen a Franklin gull in Utah. Another well informed student of the bird life of this state, Prof. Marcus E. Jones, is quoted by Davie, "Nests and Eggs of North American Birds," on the nesting habits of the California gull, but no reference to him appears in connection with the Franklin gull. Ridgway in "Notes on the Bird Fauna of the Salt Lake Valley," and in "Ornithology of the Fortieth Parallel;" Merriam, "Sixth Annual Report, U. S. Geol. Survey"; Henshaw—quoting Ridgway—in "Annotated List of Utah Birds;" and Cooke in, "Birds of Colorado," all name the Utah gull *Larus californicus*.

It would be of interest to know what data led Prof. Bailey to call this bird, *Larus franklini*.

Provo City, Utah.

The Birds of the John Day Region, Oregon

BY LOVE HOLMES MILLER

THE observations^a here recorded were made during May and June of 1899 and with the collections now in the Biology Department of the University, comprise the work done on the ornithology of the John Day region by the first University of California expedition into that part of the country.

A good general account of the expedition was given before the Science Association of the University by the geologist in charge, Dr. John C. Merriam^b

What need be added to this account will be those points regarding the topography that will bear directly upon the bird life. The locality known as the Cove is that part of the John Day basin about fifteen miles northwest of Dayville, and is some one hundred miles due southeast of The Dalles. Bridge Creek is a tributary entering the John Day, about sixty-five miles from its junction with the Columbia.

The expedition was in the field from May 25 to July 10. A distance of some three hundred miles was covered in the round trip and a range of elevation from the low, hot country on the Columbia to the pine belt in the Blue Mts. Three permanent camps were made: first at the Bridge Creek beds, June 1 to 12; second, at the Cove, Blue Basin, June 19 to 28; third, at Lower Basin in the Cove, June 29 to July 2. Thus there were twenty-five days in which collecting could be done. Half of this time was devoted to biology, making not more than thirteen days for making collections. The collection numbers fifty-four birds and ten mammals with a few reptiles and batrachians.

In his general discussion Dr. Merriam speaks of the desert character of the country and the extreme paucity of living species. The region is indeed most disappointing to the collector in search of existing forms, or to one on mere pleasure bent, yet I think there is not one in the party but considers this chapter in his experience one of the most enjoyable and profitable.

The Bridge Creek Camp was made at Allen's ranch, ten miles up Bear Creek from its junction with the John Day and twelve miles from Mitchell. The valley

^a Published by permission of Professor W. E. Ritter, head of Department of Biology.

^b "An expedition to the John Day Region, Oregon," J. C. Merriam, Proc. Sci. Assoc. Univ. of Calif., Vol. I, No. 1.